

IX. *Account of a remarkable Thunder Storm :  
In a Letter from the Rev. Anthony Wil-  
liams, Rector of St. Keverne, in Corn-  
wal, to the Rev. William Borlase, D.D.  
F. R. S.*

DEAR SIR,

Keverne, Aug. 27, 1770.

Read Feb. 7, 1771. **I** HAVE received yours, which, I must  
confess, I ought to have answered  
much sooner.

For several days before the thunder storm which  
fell on St. Keverne spire and church, on Sunday the  
18th day of February last, the wind was very hard  
at North and North West, accompanied with violent  
showers of hail, which had done some damage to  
the roof of the church, and many houses in the  
church-town. On the Sunday morning above-men-  
tioned, the wind being at North-west, from five  
o'clock during almost the whole day the wind was  
excessive hard; and about six, I saw some few  
faint flashes of lightning, which, as the day came  
on, if it continued, became imperceptible. The  
weather being so bad, prevented a great number of  
people from coming to church, which in all human  
probability was a happy circumstance; for, about a  
quarter

quarter after a eleven o'clock, while I was in the latter end of the Litany service, we had a very fierce flash of lightning, followed at the distance of about four or five seconds by the loudest thunder I remember ever to have heard; but which did no damage, nor seemed in the least to disturb any of the congregation, though at the same time the roof of the church was rifling, and the hail made a noise terrible to be heard. In half a minute after this, as near as I can possibly guess, the whole congregation, except five or six persons, were at once struck out of their senses. I myself received the shock so suddenly as not to remember I either heard the thunder or saw the lightning: the first thing that I can recollect with any degree of certainty is, that I found myself in the vicarage seat, which is very near the desk, without either gown or surplice, bearing in my arms as I then thought a dead sister, and God knows it was a miracle that she was not so; I perceived a very strong sulphureous smell, almost suffocating, and a great heat. At this time the confusion among the congregation was inconceivable, some running out of the church for safety, and returning into it again (for the stones from the roof were falling on our heads, both in and out of the church); some on their knees, imploring the divine assistance, giving themselves up to certain destruction; and a great many, in different places of the church, lying quite motionless, whom I thought then to be quite dead.

In the afternoon, my thoughts being a little composed (I believe for full two hours I could not be said to be rightly in my senses), I walked to the church, to see what damage was done; and such a scene

scene presented, as is horrible to think of, much more to see. The church-yard was almost full of ruins; the spire, which was about forty-eight feet high from the battlements of the tower, was carried off half way down, and the remaining part cracked in four places very irregularly down to the bottom. The north side of the tower from the battlements to the arch of the bell chamber window was quite out, except the corner stones, which remained firm and unremoved; the lead on the top of the tower was greatly damaged, melted in several places, and as it were rolled together. The arch of the belfry door, which was very strongly built with a remarkable hard iron stone, laid in lead, was also greatly damaged; some of the stones were cracked cross-ways, and just removed out of their places, others were quite hove out, and the lead between the joints not only melted, but loosened so as that you might pick it out with your fingers. The traces of the lightning were here discovered along the surface of the earth; the stones were thrown from the spire on the tops of many houses in the Church Town, but did no great hurt; in a gentleman's house, one stone weighing fourteen pounds fell through the roof into the chamber, but did no further hurt than to make a hole in the roof and plaistering. It is to be observed, that the stones from the spire were scattered in all directions, as well against the wind as with it, some of which, but not very large, were found but a little short of a quarter of a mile. The spire from the top six feet downwards was solid, through which passed an iron spill to fix the weather-cock on. Did not the lightning first strike on this spill, and was conducted

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through the solid part of the spire, and, having not iron to conduct it any further, burst in the hollow part of the spire, and threw the stones about in all directions? It is remarkable that the spill was found in the bell-chamber, and the weather-cock in the battlements; and that the bells were not in the least damaged, though a deal board, that lay across the beams to which the bells were hung, was split long ways in two pieces. The inside of the church still presented a much more horrible spectacle; the roof of the church was almost all gone, and some of the timber work in the north isle shattered to pieces; every seat in the church had rubbish in it, some more some less, and stones of large size, some of 150 pounds weight and upwards, scattered here and there amidst the congregation, which damaged the seats, &c. but did no hurt to the people, though they sat in those very seats where the stones fell. The lightning entered at the three ends of the church at West, made its way through the body of the church, and went out through the three ends of the church at East; the holes where it came in and where it went out are not large, neither are the walls much damaged. The belfry window was shattered to pieces, not one whole pane I believe to be found in it; many other windows also suffered greatly, the glass and munnions being much shattered. The lightning entered also through two places in the roof, one near the singing loft, and struck upon the top of a pillar just by it; the traces of it are to be seen from the top of the pillar almost to the bottom: there were then sitting by this pillar two young men, one in the singing loft, and other under him in the church, who  
were

were both lightly scorched ; he in the loft from head to foot, and the other in the face only : but it is remarkable that his hat, which hung on a nail just above him, was cut in two pieces. In the other place, the lightning entered just over the desk and pulpit, and fell in like manner on a pillar that stands in the vicarage seat ; but here it was a great deal more violent, and, as the object of its fury was my sister, I hope you will excuse my being very particular. Upon this pillar rested a large oak soil, the bottom of which was burst into six pieces, and one of the pieces, being a very large one, was thrown from its place to the distance of about 20 feet, and appeared to be burnt, the other pieces did not fall. From thence the lightning came down the pillar with great force, tore the seat into many pieces, knocked down my sister, and made its way through the bottom of the seat into the earth. She had pattens on, and the wooden part of one of them was broke into three pieces ; the holes, through which the ribbon is put to tie them together, were quite burnt out, and the ribbon found in the seat without the least damage, or so much as the knot loosened ; her shoe was burnt, and rent from the toe to the buckle ; but the buckle, which was of silver, remained unhurt ; her stocking was burnt and rent in the foot, just in the same manner as her shoe, and scorched along to the garter, and two little holes were burnt through in the leg of it : her apron, petticoats, &c. were burnt through and through, and she had several slight burns on several parts of her body, besides two bruises on her head and breast, caused by the rubbish that fell into the seat. As she was carrying out of church, she

greatly complained of a deadness in her legs, which, as she could not move them at all, I supposed were broke ; however, they were not broke, only a little burnt, and turned as black as ink ; which, by timely care, not only came to their natural colour by Tuesday noon, but could support her also to come down stairs ; and, excepting a hurry of spirits, grew quite well that week.

Not more than ten persons out of the whole congregation were hurt, and none of them to any great degree ; one young fellow, who was more frightened than hurt, remained ill a long time, but I believe he is now quite well ; the lightning touched his watch in his pocket, the marks of which may be seen on the crystal and silver part of it to this day. Nobody remembers to have heard any more thunder, or seen any more lightning after this, though the weather continued very stormy all that day ; so that this thunder storm, from beginning to end, could last but a very short time. The damage we suffer by it (which is now repairing) will amount to about 450 l.

Thus, Sir, I have given you a particular account of this dreadful accident, by which a great number of people, had it not been for the favourable, I may say, miraculous interposition of Providence, must inevitably have perished. It must really excite our wonder to consider that not only not one life was lost, but that no person was hurt to such a degree as to confine him for more than two or three days.

I remember to have seen an observation of yours :  
 “ How deplorable would be the consequences of such  
 “ blasts of lightning, if they happened where are  
 “ large

“ large congregations in time of divine service!” Here you see, Sir, they have happened under the very circumstances in which you then thought they must prove fatal. But Providence has let us know, in this remarkable case, that, let the danger be ever so great, and seemingly to us unavoidable, yet he is willing, as well as able, to save us.

I am, dear Sir,

Your most obedient,

humble servant,

Anth. Williams.